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ABSTRACT

The result of extensive research addressing the unique needs and problems of American Indians, the report concludes that a singular solution to the multiple educational problems of the Indian is precluded by variances in location, tribal size, politics, and language and cultural disparities. Giving an overview of Indian education and problems, 7 recommendations are also listed: (1) Indians must be given full control of their schools without further delay; (2) all programs must respect Indian cultural values; (3) increased professional and paraprofessional guidance and counseling services by Indians must be provided; (4) higher education programs should be enlarged and improved; (5) Indian vocational education also needs improvement; (6) extensive, imaginative research and analysis needs to be done on Indian education; and (7) public school programs for Indian children must be strengthened. Statistics used in this report were believed to be the most reliable, although it is noted that government statistics on Indians vary from agency to agency. (KM)

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Indian Education

A Special Report

by the

National Advisory Council on Vocational Education

December 1973

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NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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JAMES A. RHODES
Chairman

CALVIN DELLEFIELD
Executive Director

December 20, 1973

The Honorable Caspar Weinberger
Secretary
Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education is pleased to submit a Special Report on Indian Education. This grew out of the Council's Third Report (June 1970) which addressed deficiencies of the American education system in preparing the disadvantaged for full participation in our society. The needs and problems of the American Indian are so unique, and have been so neglected, that we felt special attention was needed. While it is a special problem, it must be viewed within the framework of the total American education system and its social and economic implications, with particular emphasis on vocational education.

A singular solution to the multiple educational problems of the American Indian is precluded by variances in geographical location, size of tribes, inter- and intra-tribal politics, reservation and non-reservation settings, urban and rural locales, and language and cultural disparities.

This report is the result of extensive research, including meetings with Indian educators and tribal leaders, Members of Congress, government officials, on-site visits to Indian communities on reservations and in urban areas, input from State Advisory Councils on Vocational Education in those states with sizeable Indian populations, and review of the extensive literature on the subject.

The statistics used in this report are those which we believed to be the most reliable. It should be noted that government statistics on Indians vary, depending upon which agency report is read.

The Council wishes to express its appreciation for the excellent cooperation of the National Advisory Council on Indian Education.

Sincerely,

James A. Rhodes

James A. Rhodes

MARTHA BACHMAN • LOWELL BURKETT • JOHN BUSTAMANTE • FRANK CANNIZZARO • GEORGE COOK • HOLLY COORS • JOANN CULLEN
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Indian Education

In 1970, there were 792,730 American Indians in the United States, most of them living in the West and Southwest. There are 467 recognized Indian governing bodies and nearly a hundred distinct Indian languages.

Many American Indians still live on federal or state reservations, but large numbers are following the rest of the population to the cities. In 1960, 28% of the Indian population lived in urban areas. By 1970, that figure had increased to 38% -- 280,000.

Many of the urban Indian population are younger men and women and they are there for job training and placement financed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). These young people have few school age children. In another ten years, the number of school-age Indian children in the cities will increase dramatically.

Almost half of the working age Indian population is chronically unemployed. Three-fourths of the American Indian families have incomes of less than $3,000/year. About half have incomes of less than $2,000 a year.

Fifty thousand reservation Indians need jobs. In another ten years, that number will increase to 60,000. These jobs must come from 1) private non-Indian manufacturing plants on or near reservations, 2) new Indian-owned businesses, or 3) public works of various kinds.

We have never had a sensible and consistent policy for Indian education.

Before 1870, missionaries tried to "civilize" the Indians -- to displace Indian culture with the culture and values of the white man. These extensive private efforts had little permanent impact on Indian life.

Between 1870 and 1930, the federal government took the major responsibility for Indian education. The federal ambition was to re-shape the American Indian into the image of America's white farmers, and to break the reservations up into small farms.

Indian education stressed basic education, farming, homemaking and English. Indian students were forbidden to speak their own language.

This massive effort failed massively. A few Indians finished school and left the reservations. The achievement level of the rest increased only a grade or two.

In 1928, as a result of the landmark Merriam Survey, the government abandoned its arrogant ambition to make Indians into synthetic white farmers.

Between 1930 and 1960, the state public schools began to take a larger share of responsibility. The curriculum stressed pride in Indian traditions, community development, the use of reservation resources, and the development of industrial skills.

Indians began to enroll in both the federal and public schools in much larger numbers. New Indian schools were built. Public policy was better in its intention, but the practice was still clumsy and uneve.

In the sixties, along with a heightened awareness of minority problems, America rediscovered her forgotten Indian population. Serious efforts were made to close the education gap. English was taught as a second language. New curricula stressed realistic preparation for life and work.

Our improved intentions are still not producing results. Indian students still fall far below national norms. We have made a better beginning, but that is all:

1) Dropout rates for Indians are twice the national average.
2) More than twenty percent of Indian men have less than five years of schooling.
3) Forty thousand Navajos, nearly a third of the tribe, are functional illiterates in English.
4) Only 18% of the Indians in federal Indian schools go to college. The national average is 32%.

Indian leaders believe almost unanimously that the reason for this sorry state of affairs is that non-Indians control the educational process.

Most Indian children are taught by foreigners who speak a foreign language, and who for years have treated Indians as inferior and inadequate. No wonder Indian children feel uncomfortable in white man's schools.

Only a handful of the teachers and administrators speak Indian languages. Few fully understand and share the values of their Indian students. Curriculum, textbooks, and educational philosophy have been fashioned to instill alien values. Teachers cannot cope with cultural and linguistic disparities.

At last, a new, brighter vision of what Indian education can be is emerging. There is a growing awareness that bilingual bicultural education built on Indian values and traditions is possible. The achievement of this ideal depends on this:

> Indian parents must be given control of the educational institutions which serve their children.

We, therefore, recommend that:

1) Indians must be given full control of their schools without further delay. Every federal, public and private school should be operated by people chosen by that school's constituency, with technical assistance and fiscal advisement available.

2) All programs must respect Indian cultural values. Programs must blend traditional Indian values and the present milieu in which the Indian must live and work. We must leave off trying to remak Indians into a white image, or homogenize them into an imaginary "red man" archetype.

3) Increased professional and paraprofessional buidance and counseling services by Indians must be provided, and certification requirements modified when necessary to accommodate native American leadership.

4) Programs of higher education assistance for Indians have stirred new ambitions and hopes. These programs should be enlarged and improved.

5) Indian vocational education needs improvement. Secondary level vocational programs must be drastically increased. Basic education must be taught, but it must be much more carefully job related than in non-Indian schools. Technical training institutes at the 13th and 14th grades should be enlarged, their curricula developed in close collaboration with the industries in which these Indian graduates will be placed. Students should be encouraged to remain in those programs long enough to qualify for supervisory and leadership roles.

6) We know next to nothing about Indian education. Comprehensive data is non-existent. We are planning in the dark. The problems of the Indian are unusually complex and beg for extensive imaginative research and analysis.

7) We must begin to put other programs in place: programs for pre-school children, alternative programs for drop-outs, expanded adult education programs, special programs for exceptional children. Public school programs for Indian children must be strengthened.

National awareness of our neglected responsibility to the American Indian is higher than ever in history. We must not miss the opportunity to make the massive changes in Indian education which are so long overdue.